

Pearl Harbor's 75th Anniversary and a birth of Service and Volunteerism

Lessons of the past are fuel for our future.

Today, we commemorate the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor, a tragedy for the United States Navy and all Americans. Yet, from tragedy, America sprinted into action and the true power of public service and volunteerism was revitalized and changed our Nation, forever.

In 1941, America was divided on many fronts. There was racial injustice, which exposed some of the most horrific acts of violence and hatred geared towards minorities. Americans were still feeling the harsh effects of the Great Depression, and the backlash of a struggling economy created much uncertainty, fueling more prejudice and bigotry.

Many Americans remembered the sacrifices of World War I. Millions served in uniform and the scars remained fresh and created an opposition against fascist powers.

On December 7, 1941, in just two hours, hundreds of Japanese pilots delivered a crushing blow to our United States Navy, killing more than 2,000 Americans and wounding another 1,000. Ships and many other Navy assets were destroyed, but most importantly, the hearts of Americans were devastated.

The devastation only lasted a moment, then the American people sprang into action. The country coalesced and immediately began enrolling to serve and volunteered across the country to support the home front and the global community.

Pearl Harbor inspired a generation that saw service as a responsibility and that generation inspired generations to follow. Today, organizations such as the AmeriCorps have contributed more than 1.4 billion hours in service across America. Each year, nonprofit organizations and communities around the United States reap the benefits of dedicated AmeriCorps volunteers who seek to alleviate the lasting effects of poverty.

Today we honor those we lost on December 7, 1941. We also honor the Pearl Harbor veterans who survived that dark morning, many of whom have requested their remains be laid to rest beside those brave Americans they served beside that perished that day. Women and men have sought to lead lives of devotion to service and volunteerism by applying their talents to public service since Pearl Harbor. They left a better America than they had inherited. I encourage all Americans to seek local avenues to get involved and use your unique skills and talents to encourage generations to come.

For opportunities to volunteer in Virginia and or highlight the volunteerism of others, please visit <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/community/index2.cgi>.

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